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OUR NATIONAL INLAND WATERWAYS POLICY¹

Under any circumstances I should welcome the chance of speaking at Memphis in the old historic State of Tennessee, rich in its glorious past and in the certainty of an even greater future; but I especially congratulate myself that I am able to speak here on an occasion like this, when I meet not only the citizens of Tennessee, but many of the citizens of Mississippi and Arkansas and of other states as well; and when the chief executives of so many states are gathered to consider a subject of momentous interest to all. The Mississippi Valley is a magnificent empire in size and fertility. It is better adapted to the development of inland navigation than any other valley in either hemisphere; for there are 12,000 miles of waterway now more or less fully navigable, and the conditions are so favorable that it will be easy to increase the extent of navigable waterways to almost any required degree by canalization. Early in our industrial history this valley was the seat of the largest development of inland navigation in the United States, and perhaps you will pardon my mentioning that the first steamboat west of the Alleghenies was built by a Roosevelt, my great-grandfather's brother, in 1811, for the New Orleans trade, and in that year made the trip from Pittsburg to New Orleans. But from various causes river and canal transportation declined all over the United States as the railroad systems came to their full development. It is our business to see that the decline is not permanent; and it is of interest to remember that nearly a century ago President Madison advocated the canalization of the Mississippi.

In wealth of natural resources no kingdom of Europe can compare with the Mississippi Valley and the region around the Great Lakes, taken together, and in population this huge fertile plain already surpasses all save one or two of the largest European kingdoms. In this empire a peculiarly stalwart and masterful people finds itself in the surroundings best fitted for the full development of its powers and faculties. There has been a great

¹From address delivered by President Roosevelt to the Deep Waterway Convention at Memphis, Tenn., October 4, 1907.

growth of manufacturing centers in the valley; the movement is good if it does not go too far; but I most earnestly hope that this region as a whole will remain predominantly agricultural. The people who live in the country districts, and who till the small or medium-sized farms on which they live, make up what is on the whole the most valuable asset in our national life. There can be just as real progress and culture in the country as in the city; especially in these days of rural free delivery, trolleys, bicycles, telephones, good roads, and school improvements. The valley of the Mississippi is politically and commercially more important than any other valley on the face of the globe. Here more than anywhere else will be determined the future of the United States and indeed of the whole western world; and the type of civilization reached in this mighty valley, in this vast stretch of country lying between the Alleghenies and the Rockies, the Great Lakes and the Gulf, will largely fix the type of civilization for the whole Western Hemisphere. Already, as our history shows, the West has determined our national political development, and the fundamental principle of present American politics, political equality, was originally a western idea.

The wonderful variety of resources in different portions of the valley makes the demand for transportation altogether exceptional. Coal, lumber, corn, wheat, cotton, cattle—on the surface of the soil and beneath the soil the riches are great. There are already evident strong tendencies to increase the carrying of freight from the northern part of the valley to the Gulf. Throughout the valley the land is so fertile as to make the field for the farmer peculiarly attractive; and where in the west the climate becomes dryer we enter upon the ranching country; while in addition to the products of the soil there are also the manufactures supplied in innumerable manufacturing centers, great and small. Cities of astonishing growth are found everywhere from the Gulf to the Great Lakes, from the Alleghenies to the Rockies; most of them being situated on the great river which flows by your doors or upon some of its numerous navigable tributaries. New mineral fields are discovered every year; and the constantly increasing use of all the devices of intensive cultivation steadily adds to the productive power of the farms. Above all, the average man is honest, intelligent, self-reliant, and orderly, and therefore a good

citizen; and farmer and wageworker alike—in the last analysis the two most important men in the community—enjoy a standard of living, and have developed a standard of self-respecting, self-reliant manhood, which are of good augury for the future of the entire Republic. No man can foresee the limit of the possibility of development in the Mississippi Valley.

Such being the case, and this valley being literally the heart of the United States, all that concerns its welfare must concern likewise the whole country. Therefore, the Mississippi River and its tributaries ought by all means to be utilized to their utmost possibility. Facility of cheap transportation is an essential in our modern civilization, and we cannot afford any longer to neglect the great highways which nature has provided for us. These natural highways, the waterways, can never be monopolized by any corporation. They belong to all the people, and it is in the power of no one to take them away. Wherever a navigable river runs beside railroads the problem of regulating the rates on the railroads becomes far easier, because river regulation is rate regulation. When the water rate sinks, the land rate cannot be kept at an excessive height. Therefore it is of national importance to develop these streams as highways to the fullest extent which is genuinely profitable. Year by year transportation problems become more acute, and the time has come when the rivers really fit to serve as arteries of trade should be provided with channels deep enough and wide enough to make the investment of the necessary money profitable to the public. The National Government should undertake this work. Where the immediately abutting land is markedly benefited, and this benefit can be definitely localized, I trust that there will be careful investigation to see whether some way can be devised by which the immediate beneficiaries may pay a portion of the expenses—as is now the custom as regards certain classes of improvements in our municipalities; and measures should be taken to secure from the localities specially benefited proper terminal facilities. The expense to the Nation of entering upon such a scheme of river improvement as that which I believe it should undertake, will necessarily be great. Many cautious and conservative people will look askance upon the project, and from every standpoint it is necessary, if we wish to make it successful, that we should enter upon it only under conditions which will

guarantee the Nation against waste of its money, and which will insure us against entering upon any project until after the most elaborate expert examination, and reliable calculation of the proportion between cost and benefit. In any project like this there should be a definite policy, and a resolute purpose to keep in mind that the only improvements made should be those really national in their character. We should act on the same principle in improving our rivers that we should follow in improving our harbors. The great harbors are of consequence not merely to the immediate localities, but to immense stretches of country; and the same is true of the great rivers. It is these great rivers and great harbors the improvement of which is of primary national interest. The main streams should be improved to the highest practical degree of efficiency before improvements are attempted on the branches, and work should be undertaken only when completion is in sight within a reasonable time, so that assured results may be gained and the communities affected depend upon the improvements. Moreover, as an incident in caring for the river so that it may become an efficient channel of transportation, the United States Government should do its full part in levee building, which, in the lower reaches of the river, will not only give a channel for commerce, but will also give protection to the adjacent bottom lands.

Immense sums have already been spent upon the Mississippi by the States and the Nation, yet much of it remains practically unused for commerce. The reasons for this fact are many. One is that the work done by the National Government at least has not been based upon a definite and continuous plan. Appropriations by Congress, instead of assuring the steady progress and timely completion of each piece of work as it was undertaken, have been irregular and uncertain. As a direct consequence, far-reaching plans have been discouraged and continuity in execution has been made impossible. It is altogether unlikely that better results will be obtained so long as the method is followed of making partial appropriations at irregular intervals for works which should never be undertaken until it is certain that they can be carried to completion within a definite and reasonable time. Planned and orderly development is essential to the best use of every natural resource, and to none more than to the best use of our inland waterways. In

the case of the waterways it has been conspicuously absent. Because such foresight was lacking, the interests of our rivers have been in fact overlooked, in spite of the immense sums spent upon them. It is evident that their most urgent need is a farsighted and comprehensive plan, dealing not with navigation alone, nor with irrigation alone, but considering our inland waterways as a whole, and with reference to every use to which they can be put. The central motive of such a plan should be to get from the streams of the United States not only the fullest but also the most permanent service they are capable of rendering to the Nation as a whole.

The industries developed under the stimulus of the railroads are for the most part permanent industries, and therefore they form the basis for future development. But the railroads have shown that they alone cannot meet the demands of the country for transportation, and where this is true the rivers should begin to supplement the railroads, to the benefit of both, by relieving them of certain of the less profitable classes of freight. The more farseeing railroad men, I am glad to tell you, realize this fact, and many of them have become earnest advocates of the improvement of the Mississippi, so that it may become a sort of inland sea-board, extending from the Gulf far into the interior, and I hope ultimately to the Great Lakes. An investigation of the proposed Lakes-to-the-Gulf deep waterway is now in progress under an appropriation of the last Congress. We shall await its results with the keenest interest. The decision is obviously of capital importance to our internal development and scarcely less so in relation to external commerce.

This is but one of the many projects which it is time to consider, although a most important one. Plans for the improvement of our inland navigation may fairly begin with our greatest river and its chief tributaries, but they cannot end there. The lands which the Columbia drains include a vast area of rich grain fields and fruit lands, much of which is not easily reached by railways. The removal of obstructions in the Columbia and its chief tributaries would open to navigation and inexpensive freight transportation fully 2,000 miles of channel. The Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers with their tidal openings into San Francisco Bay are partly navigable now. Their navigation should be maintained and

improved, so as to open the marvelously rich valley of California to inexpensive traffic, in order to facilitate both rate regulation and the control of the waters for other purposes. And many other rivers of the United States demand improvement, so as better to meet the requirements of increasing production from the soil, increasing manufacture, and a rapidly growing population.

While thus the improvement of inland navigation is a vital problem, there are other questions of no less consequence connected with our waterways. One of these relates to the purity of waters used for the supply of towns and cities, to the prevention of pollution by manufacturing and other industries, and to the protection of drainage areas from soil wash through forest covering or judicious cultivation. With our constantly increasing population this question becomes more and more pressing, because the health and safety of great bodies of citizens are directly involved.

Another important group of questions concerns the irrigation of arid lands, the prevention of floods, and the reclamation of swamps. Already many thousands of homes have been established on the arid regions, and the population and wealth of seventeen states and territories have been largely increased through irrigation. Yet this means of national development is still in its infancy, and it will doubtless long continue to multiply homes and increase the productiveness and power of the Nation. The reclamation of overflow lands and marshes, both in the interior and along the coasts, has already been carried on with admirable results, but in this field, too, scarcely more than a good beginning has yet been made. Still another fundamentally important question is that of water power. Its significance in the future development of our whole country, and especially of the West, is but just beginning to be understood. The plan of the City of Los Angeles, for example, to bring water for its use a distance of nearly 250 miles—perhaps the boldest project of the kind in modern times—promises not only to achieve its purpose, but in addition to produce a water power sufficiently valuable to pay large interest on the investment of over \$23,000,000.

Hitherto such opportunities for using water to double purpose have not always been seized. Thus it has recently been shown that water enough is flowing unused over government dams, built to

improve navigation, to produce many hundreds of thousands of horsepower. It is computed that the annual value of the available but unused water power in the United States exceeds the annual value of the products of all our mines. Furthermore, it is calculated that under judicious handling the power of our streams may be made to pay for all the works required for the complete development and control of our inland waterways.

Forests are the most effective preventers of floods, especially when they grow on the higher mountain slopes. The national forest policy, inaugurated primarily to avert or mitigate the timber famine which is now beginning to be felt, has been effective also in securing partial control of floods by retarding the run-off and checking the erosion of the higher slopes within the national forests. Still the loss from soil wash is enormous. It is computed that one-fifth of a cubic mile in volume, or one billion tons in weight of the richest soil matter of the United States, is annually gathered in storm rivulets, washed into the rivers, and borne into the sea. The loss to the farmer is in effect a tax greater than all other land taxes combined, and one yielding absolutely no return. The Department of Agriculture is now devising and testing means to check this enormous waste through improved methods of agriculture and forest management.

Citizens of all portions of the country are coming to realize that, however important the improvement of navigation may be, it is only one of many ends to be kept in view. The demand for navigation is hardly more pressing than the demands for reclaiming lands by irrigation in the arid regions and by drainage in the humid lowlands, or for utilizing the water power now running to waste, or for purifying the waters so as to reduce or remove the tax of soil waste, to promote manufactures and safeguard life. It is the part of wisdom to adopt not a jumble of unrelated plans, but a single comprehensive scheme for meeting all the demands so far as possible at the same time and by the same means. This is the reason why the Inland Waterways Commission was created in March last, largely in response to petitions from citizens of the interior, including many of the members of this Congress. Broad instructions were given to the Commission in accordance with this general policy that no plan should be prepared for the use of any stream for a single purpose without carefully considering, and so

far as practicable actually providing for, the use of that stream for every other purpose. Plans for navigation and power should provide with special care for sites and terminals, not only for the immediate present, but also for the future. It is because of my conviction in these matters that I am here. The Inland Waterways Commission has a task broader than the consideration of waterways alone. There is an intimate relation between our streams and the development and conservation of all the other great permanent sources of wealth. It is not possible rightly to consider the one without the other. No study of the problem of the waterways could hope to be successful which failed to consider also the remaining factors in the great problem of conserving all our resources. Accordingly, I have asked the Waterways Commission to take account of the orderly development and conservation, not alone of the waters, but also of the soil, the forests, the mines, and all the other natural resources of our country.

Many of these resources which we have been in the habit of calling inexhaustible are being rapidly exhausted, or in certain regions have actually disappeared. Coal mines, oil and gas fields, and iron mines in important numbers are already worked out. The coal and oil measures which remain are passing rapidly, or have actually passed, into the possession of great corporations, who acquire ominous power through an unchecked control of these prime necessities of modern life; a control without supervision of any kind. We are consuming our forests three times faster than they are being reproduced. Some of the richest timber lands of this continent have already been destroyed, and not replaced, and other vast areas are on the verge of destruction. Yet forests, unlike mines, can be so handled as to yield the best results of use, without exhaustion, just like grain fields.

Our public lands, whose highest use is to supply homes for our people, have been and are still being taken in great quantities by large private owners, to whom home-making is at the very best but a secondary motive subordinate to the desire for profit. To allow the public lands to be worked by the tenants of rich men for the profit of the landlords, instead of by freeholders for the livelihood of their wives and children, is little less than a crime against our people and our institutions. The great central fact of the public land situation, as the Public Lands Commission well said, is

that the amount of public land patented by the government to individuals is increasing out of all proportion to the number of new homes. It is clear beyond peradventure that our natural resources have been and are still being abused, that continued abuse will destroy them, and that we have at last reached the forks of the road. We are face to face with the great fact that the whole future of the Nation is directly at stake in the momentous decision which is forced upon us. Shall we continue the waste and destruction of our natural resources, or shall we conserve them? There is no other question of equal gravity now before the Nation.

It is the plain duty of those of us who for the moment are responsible to make inventory of the natural resources which have been handed down to us, to forecast as well as we may the needs of the future, and so to handle the great sources of our prosperity as not to destroy in advance all hope for the prosperity of our descendants.

As I have said elsewhere, the conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others. To solve it, the whole Nation must undertake the task through their organizations and associations, through the men whom they have made specially responsible for the welfare of the several States, and finally through Congress and the Executive. As a preliminary step, the Inland Waterways Commission has asked me to call a conference on the conservation of natural resources, including, of course, the streams, to meet in Washington during the coming winter. I shall accordingly call such conference. It ought to be among the most important gatherings in our history, for none have had a more vital question to consider.

There is a great national project already under way which renders the improvement of the Mississippi River and its tributaries specially needful. I mean the Panama Canal. The digging of that canal will be of benefit to the whole country, but most of all to the States of the Pacific slope and the Gulf; and if the Mississippi is properly improved, to the States through which it flows. The digging of the Panama Canal is the greatest engineering feat which has yet been attempted on this globe. The work has been going on most successfully and with fewer drawbacks and difficulties than I had dared hope. When under our

treaty with Panama we took possession of the Canal Zone I was confident that we should be able to build the canal, but I took it for granted that we should meet many unexpected difficulties, not only in the actual work, but through, and because of, the diseases which had made the Isthmus a byword of unhealthfulness. The work done in making the conditions on the Isthmus healthy, however, has been so successful that at present the death rate among the thousands of Americans engaged in the canal work is lower than in most localities in the United States. The organization has been perfected, the machinery installed, and the actual work, of the dredges, the steam shovels, and the dirt trains, is going on with constantly increasing rapidity and effectiveness. In the month of September just closed over fourteen hundred thousand cubic yards of material were removed, chiefly from the Culebra Cut—the record removal, two hundred thousand yards better than the August record, of which I spoke the day before yesterday—and if this rate can be kept up, as I believe it will be kept up, the work of digging will be through in half a dozen years. The finishing of the locks of the great dam may take a little longer; but it begins to look as though the work will be completed even sooner than we had estimated.

Remember, gentlemen, that any work like this entails grave responsibilities. The one intolerable position for a self-respecting nation, as for a self-respecting man, is to bluff and then not be able to make good. We have accepted the Monroe doctrine as a cardinal feature of our foreign policy. We have undertaken not only to build but to police and to guard the Panama Canal. This means, unless we are willing to accept the humiliation of being treated some time by some strong nation as a vain and weak braggart, that we must build and maintain our navy at the highest point of efficiency. When the canal is finished our navy can move from one ocean to the other at will; for, remember that our doors open on both oceans. Until then our battle fleet, which should always be kept and maneuvered as a unit, ought now to appear in our home waters in one ocean and now to appear in our home waters in the other. And, oh my friends and fellow-Americans, I most earnestly hope all our people will remember that in the fundamental questions most deeply affecting the life of the Nation there can be no proper division on party lines. Matters of such grave

moment should be dealt with along the lines of consistent and well thought-out policy, without regard to any change of administration or of party at Washington. Such questions as the upbuilding and maintenance of the United States navy, the completion of the Panama Canal in accordance with the plans now being carried out, the conservation of our national resources, and the improvement of the Mississippi River, are not party questions. I am striving to accomplish what I can in such matters as these because the welfare of the Nation imperiously demands the action that I am taking. It is action in the interest of all the people, and the need for it will be as great long after I have passed out of public life as it is now. On these great points that I have mentioned, as on others I could mention, from the standpoint of the Nation the policy is everything, while it is of little importance who carries it out so long as it actually is carried out. Therefore, I hope you will see to it, according to your best endeavor, that the policy is accepted as permanent, as something to be persevered in because of the interest of the whole people, and without regard to any possible political changes.